For many years their lives had centered about the children. For years whooping cough, about small early dis-shediences, later about Sunday tennis. stood united to protect the chil-against disease, trouble and

Now that the children were no longer children, they were sometimes lonely and still apprehensive. They feared motorcar accidents, and Walter Wheeler had withstood the appeals of Jim for a half dozen years. They f Jim for a half dozen years. They feared trains for them, and journeys, and unhappy marriages, and hid their fears from each other. Their nightly prayers were "to keep them safe and happy."

But they saw life reaching out and taking them, one by one. They saw them still as children, but as children determined to bear their own burdens.

determined to bear their own burdens. determined to bear their own burdens. Jim stayed out late sometimes, and considered his manhood in question if interrogated. Nina was married and out of the home, but there loomed beout of the home, but there loomed be-fore them the possibility of maternity and its dangers for her. There re-mained only Elizabeth, and on her they lavished the care formerly divided

among the three.

It was their intention and determination that she should never know trouble. She was tenderer than the saw her, not as a healthy, normal girl, but as something fragile and very

Nina was different. They had although they had never put their anxiety to each other. Nina had always over-run her dress allowance, although she had never failed to be sweetly penitent about it, and Nins had always placed an undue emphasis, on things. Her bedroom before her marriage was clutbedroom before her marriage was clut-tered with odds and ends, cotillion faand photographs, college pennants small unwise purchases—trophies

cost a great deal, and it was not so cost a great deal, and it was not so much to introduce her to society as to put a family recognition on a fact al-ready accomplished, for Nina had brought herself out unofficially at six-teen. There had been the club ball-room, and a great many flowers which withered before they could be got to the hespital; and new clothing for all the fam'ry, and a caterer and orchestra. After that, for a cold and tumultuous winter Mrs. Wheeler had sat up with the downgars night after night artis the downgers night after night until Nina sleep, while she went about her household duties. She had aged, rather, and her determined smile had grown a little fixed.

was a good woman, and she wanted her children's happiness more than anything in the world, but she had a faint and sternly repressed feeling of relief when Nina announced her engagement. Nina did it with char-acteristic sangfroid, at dinner one

aitht.
"Don't ring for Annie for a minute,
"Don't ring for Annie for a minute,
mother," she said. "I want to tell you
mother," she said. mother," she said. "I want to tell you all something. I'm going to marry Les-There had been a momentary pause

Then her father said:
"Just a minute. Is that Will Ward's He's not a boy."

"Well, he'll come around to see me before there's any engagement. Has that occurred to either of you?"

"Oh, he'll be around. He'd have come tonight, but Howard Moore is having his bachelor dinner. I hope he desn't look what to pieces tomorrow. doesn't look shot to pieces tomorrow.

These bachelor things—! We'd better have a dinner or something, mother,

There had been the dinner, with a allyer loving oup bought for the occa-sion, and thereafter to sit out its use-less days on the Sherical to the occadays on the Sheraton sideboard. And there had been a trousseau and a wedding so expensive that a small frown of anxiety had developed between Wal-ter Wheeler's eyebrows and stayed

For Nina's passion for things was inherent, persisting after her marriage. She discounted her birthdays and Christmases in advance, coming around to his office a couple of months before the winter holidays and needing something badly.
"It's like this, daddy." she would

tes. "You're going to give me a check for Christmas, anyhow, aren't you? And it would do me more good now. I simply can't go to another ball." Where's your trousseau?'

"It's worn out—danced to rags. And don't understand it. Nina. You

and Leslie have a good income. Your mother and I-didn't have any social de-

would get out his checkbook and check slowly and thoughtfully.

But he knew that when the time he had inquired a said despondent almost to the end, and then slip into a jeweler's and buy Nina something she simply couldn't do without. It wasn't quite fair, he felt. It wasn't fair to Jim og to Elizabeth. Particularly to Elizabeth.

It wasn't fair to Jim og to Elizabeth. Particularly to Elizabeth.

Bometimes he looked at Elizabeth with a little prayer in his heart, never articulate, that life would be good to her; that she might keep her illusions and her dreams; that the soundness and wholesomeness of her might keep her from unhappiness. Sometimes, as she sat reading or sewing, with the light behind her shining through her soft hair, he saw in her a purity that was almost radiant.

"Well, I don't think it likely that I'll have to," he had observed, dryly, "But here's the point, and I think it's important. I don't intend to work without some compensation, and my family is my compensation. You just hang around and make me happy, as you do, and you're fulfilling your economic place in the Nation. Don't you forget it, either."

That had comforted her. She had determined then never to marry, but

He was in arms at once a night or two before Dick had invited Elizabeth to hang around, as he suggested, for the rest of her life. She was quite earnest about it, and resolved.

pairs of gigglers in the pantry at the about next Wednesday evening e refrigerator, pairs on the stairs and on since Dick Livingstone had gone. refrigerator, pairs on the stairs and on the verandah, cigar-ashes—my cigars— the verandah, cigar-ashes—my cigars and cigarentes over everything, and infernal spooning going on than the first time she acknowledged to herself that she had been fond of him,

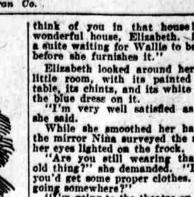
THE BREAKING POINT

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

"The Amazing Interlude," and many other striking and successful novels.
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"I'm not going to mother. Nina. She has had a lot of expense this month."

She got up.
"Be nice to him, anyhow," she said.
"He's crazy about you, and when I



"You'll have, to marry sometime, and it isn't as though Wallie was dissipated on anything like that"

He had resumed his newspaper, to put it down almost at once.

"What's that Sayre boy hanging around for?"

"I think he's in love with her, Walter."

"Love? Any of the Sayre tribe? Jim Sayre drank himself to death, and this boy is like him. And Jim Sayre wasn't

faithful to his wife. This boy is-well, he's an heir. That's why he was be-Margaret Wheeler stared at him. "Why, Walter!" she said. "He's a nice boy, and he's a gentleman."
"Why? Because he gets up when you come into the room? Why in heaven's name don't you encourage real men to come here? There's Dick Livingstone. He's a man."

Margaret hesitated. "Walter, have you ever thought there was anything queer about Dick Living-stone's coming here?" Darned good for the town that he

did come."
"But—nobody ever dreamed that a sigh.

'I really don't know what to do with father,' she said. 'He files off at a tangent over the smallest things.

Elizabeth, dear, can you lend me \$20? David and Lucy had a nephew. Inen he turns up, and they send nim to medical college, and all that." "I've got some relations I haven't notified the town I possess," he said Elizabeth, dear, can you lend me \$20? I'll get my allowance on Tuesday."

grimly "Well, there's comething odd. don't believe Henry Livingstone, the Wyoming brother, ever had a son."
"What possible foundation have you for a statement like that?"

"Mrs. Cook Morgan's sister-in-law has been visiting her lately. She says she knew Henry Livingstone well years ago in the West, and she never heard he was married. She says positively he was not married."

"And trust the Morgan woman to spread the good news," he said with angry sarcasm. "Well, suppose that's Suppose Dick is an illegitimate child? That's the worst that's implied, I dare say. That's nothing against Dick himself. I'll tell the world there's

Dick himself. I'll tell the world there sood blood on the Livingstone side, any-how."

"You were very particular about Wallie Sayre's heredity, Walter."

"That's different," he retorted, and retired into gloomy silence behind his newspaper. Drat these women, any-how. It was like some fool female to come there and rake up some old and defunct scandal. He'd stand up for Dick, if it ever came to a show-down.

"I was thinking it over last night, You'll have to marry some time, and it isn't as though Wallie was dissipated, or anything like that. I suppose he knows his way about, but then they know."

"You couldn t was that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engaged for the that you are going to be engage ne'd better go elsewhere. He-

he'd better go elsewhere. He
He got up and whistled or the dog.
"I'm going to take a walk," he said
briefly, and went out. He always took
well when things disturbed him. walk when things disturbed him On the Sunday afternoon after Dick had gone Elizabeth was alone in her room upstairs. On the bed lay the sort of gown Nina would have called a dinner dress, and to which Elizabeth referred as her dark blue. Seen thus, in the room which was her own expression, there was a certain nobility about her very simplicity, a steadiness about her eyes that was almost

disconcerting.
"She's the saintly looking sort that would go on the rocks for some man,"
Nina had said once, rather flippantly,
"and never know she was shipwrecked. No man in the world could do that to

But just then Elizabeth looked totally unlike shipwreck. Nothing seemed more like a safe harbor than the Wheeler house that afternoon, or all the afternoons.

Life went on, the comfortable life of an upper-middle-class household. Candles and flowers on the table and a neat waitress to serve; little carefully planned shopping expeditions; fine hand-sewing on dainty undergarments for rainy days; small tributes of books and candy; invitations and consultations as to what to wear; choir practice, a class in the Sunday school, a little work among the poor; the volcano which had been Nina overflowing elsewhere in a smart little house with a butler out on the Ridgely road.

She looked what she was, faithful and quietly loyal, steady-eyed and serene; quietly loyal, steady-eyed and serene; not asking greatly but hoping much; full of small unvisualized dreams and little inarticulate prayers; waiting, without knowing that she was waiting. Sometimes she worried. She thought she ought to "do something." A good many of the girls she knew wanted to do concepting, but they were versue as something, but they were vague as to what. She felt at those times that And tearing it off would say:

"Now, remember, Nina, this is for Christmas. Don't feel aggrieved when the time comes and you have no gift from us.

But he knew that when the time time Margaret, his wife, would hold set almost to the end, and then slip late a loweler; and how Nina compared to the late of t

She picked up the blue dress and, house was gayer when Nina standing before her mirror, held it up "Yes. And you were pretty sick it. Full of roistering young idiots. It looked rather shabby, she thought, but the theatre was not like a dance, and anyhow it would look better at night. She had been thinking about next wednesday evening ever this grant or the stairs and on the stairs are this stairs and on the stairs and on the stairs are the stairs and on the stairs are the stairs and on the stairs are the sta

I'm very well satisfied as I am,"

she said.

While she smoothed her hair before the mirror Nina surveyed the room and her eyes lighted on the frock.

"Are you still wearing that shabby old thing?" she demanded. "I do wish you'd get some proper clothes. Are you going somewhere?"

"I'm going to the theatre on Wednesday night."

day night."
"Who with?" Nina in her family was highly colloquial.
"With Dr. Livingstone."
"Are you joking?" Nina demanded.
"Joking? Of course not."

Nina sat down again on the bed, her ryes on her sister, curious and not a

little apprehensive.

"It's the first time it's ever happened, to my knowledge," she declared.
"I know he's avoided me like poison. I thought he hated women. You know Clare Rossiter is—"

Elizabeth turned suddenly.
"Clare is ridiculous," she said. "She hasn't any reserve, or dignity, or anything else. And I don't see what my going to the theatre with Dick Livingstone has to do with her, anyhow."

Nina raised her carefully plucked eyebrows. brows.

"Really!" she said. "You needn't jump down my throat, you know. war, and having to decide about life and death, and so on.

She hoped he did not think she was only a child.

She heard Nina coming up the stairs. At the click of her high heels on the hard wood she placed the dress on the bed again, and went to the window. Her father was on the path below, clearly headed for a walk. She knew then that Nina had been asking for something.

Nina came in and closed the door.

Nina came in and closed the door.

She went to the door and opened it.

She was smaller than Elizabeth and very pretty. Her eyebrows had been drawn to a tidy line, and from the top of her shining head to her brown suede pumps she was exquisite with the hours of careful tending and careful dressing she gave her young body. Exquisitely pretty, 100.

She sat down on Elizabeth's bed with suspect what the family had never guessed, that Nina was not very happy. More and more she saw in Nina's sion for clothes and gayety, for small possessions, an attempt to substitute them for real things. She even susthem for real things. She even sus-pected that sometimes Nina was a little

"Well, ask mother for the rest, won't you? You needn't say it's for me.
I'll give it to you Tuesday."
"Hello," he said, "I was on the point of asking Central to give me this number so I could get you on the ups had a lot of expense this month.
"Then I'll borrow it from Wallie stairs telephone."
"Nina said, accepting her de-"Nina and I were talking. 'I'm

"Then I'll borrow it from Wallie Sayre." Nina said, accepting her defeat cheerfully. "If it was an ordinary bill it could wait, but I lost it at bridge last night and it's got to be paid."
"You oughtn't to play bridge for money." Elizabeth said, a bit primly. "And if Leslie knew you borrowed from Wallace Sayre—""
Wallace Sayre—""
I forgot! Wallie's downstairs, Elizabeth. Really, if he wasn't so funny, he'd be tragle."

Why tragic? He has everything in stairs telephone."
"Nina and I were talking. 'I'm sorry."
Wallie, in spite of Walter Wheeler's opinion of him, was an engaging youth with a wide smile, an air of careless well-being, and an obstinate jaw. What he wanted he went after and generally secured, and Elizabeth, enlightened by Nina, began to have a small anxious feeling that afternoon that what he wanted just now happened to be herself. "Why tragic? He has everything in self.

up her hand kissed it.
"You're so cool and sweet," he

Can soil Mentity by lost in good? See how this throbbing story of mystery, regeneration and love solves these problems.

wonderful house, Elizabeth. She's got a suite waiting for Wallis to be married before she furnishes it."

Elizabeth looked around her virginal little room, with its painted dressing table, its chintz, and its white bed with the blue dress on it. made her uncomfortable. Back of him, suddenly, was that strange and mysterious region where men of his sort lived their furtive man-life, where they knew their way about. She had no curiosity and no interest, but the mere fact of its existence as revealed by Nina repelled her.

"There are plenty like me," she said. "Don't be silly, Wally. I hate having my hand kissed."

"I wonder," he observed shrewdly, "whether that's really true, or whether you just hate having me do it?"

When Nina came in he was drawing a rough sketch of his new power boat, being built in Florida.

Nina's delay was explained by the

being built in Florida.

Nina's delay was explained by the appearance, a few minutes later, of a rather sullen Annie with a tea tray. "Put in a word for me, Nina," Wallie begged. "I intend to ask Elizabeth

"Put in a word for me, Nina," Wallie begged. "I intend to ask Elizabeth
to go to the theatre this week, and I
think she is going to refuse."

"What's the play?" Nina inquired
negligently. She was privately determining that her mother needed a tea
cart and a new tea service. There were
some in old Georgian silver—

"The Valley." Not that the play
matters. It's Beverly Carlysle."

"I thought she was dead, or something." thing."
Or something is right. She retired her success.

years ago, at the top of her success. She was a howling beauty, I'm told. I never saw her. There was some queer story. I've forgotten it. I was skid then. How about it, Elizabeth?" "I'm sorry. I'm going Wednesday night." He looked downcast over that, and

he was curious, too. But he made no comment save:

"Well, better luck next time."

"Just imagine," said Nina. "She's
going with Dick Livingstone. Can you
imagine it?"

But Wallace Sayre could and did.

He had rather a stricken moment, too. Of course, there might be nothing to it; but on the other hand, they very well might. And Livingstone was the sort to attract the feminine woman; be had gravity and responsibility. He was older, too, and that flattered a girl.

"He's not a bit attractive," Nina was, saying. "Quiet, and—well, I don't suppose he knows what he's got

Wallie was watching Elizabeth. "Oh. I don't know," he said, with masculine fairness. "He's a good sort, and he's pretty much of a man."

He was quite sure that the look Elizabeth and he's pretty much of a man." cth gave him was grateful.

He went soon after that, keeping up an appearance of gayety to the end, and very careful to hope that Elizabeth would enjoy the play.

"She's a wonder, they say," he said from the doorway. "Take two hankles along, for it's got more tears than 'East Lynne' and 'The Old Homestcad' put together."

He went out, holding himself very erect and looking very cheerful until he reached the corner. There, however, he slumped, and it was a rather despondent young man who stood some time later on the center of the deserted over the small river, and surveyed the water with moody eyes.

In the dusky living room Nina was speaking her mind. "You treat him like a dog," she said.

"You treat him like a dog," she said.

"Oh, I know you're civil to him, but
if any man looked at me the way Wa!lie looks at you—I don't know,
though," she added, thoughtfully. "It
may be that is why he is so keen. It
muy be good tactics. Most girls fall for
him with a crash."

she saw that she had not heard. Her eyes were fixed on something on the street beyond the window. Nina looked know."

Suddenly he leaned over and catching lives the Livingstone car was going by. To be continued tomorrow

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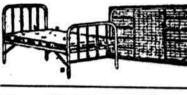


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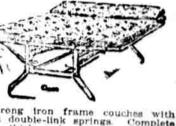
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